



Kentucky Squads Undertake Statewide Training Initiative

By Clayton Roberts

During 2009, members of the ATF-sponsored Kentucky Explosives Incident Response Task Force, including Lexington Police, Kentucky State Police, Paducah Police, Louisville-Metro Police, and Owensboro Police, participated in a large-scale training initiative. The project spun out of the results of the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Bombing Prevention (OBP) Capabilities Analysis, completed by the Kentucky squads in 2008.

The Capabilities Analysis compares an agency's current equipment and training with the recommended capabilities outlined in the Target Capabilities List (TCL). The OBP training recommendations for Lexington Police included: Advanced Electronics Training; Advanced Training in Booby Trap and Intrusion Detection Systems; and Advanced Threat Assessment/Diagnostics Training. Similar recommendations were received by other Kentucky squads.

Upon review of the recommendation, the search began for suppliers of these courses through "traditional" sources (i.e. FREE), such as the FBI, ATF, DHS, etc.

The result of this search revealed that these advanced courses were only available from the private sector. Those who

have researched the cost of private sector training are keenly aware that there is no such thing as inexpensive quality private sector training. The question became, "We want the training, and they want us to have the training. How do we pay for it?"

A great amount of support for the project was received; however, as grant funds are elusive and dwindling, there simply was not a pot of gold to be found. The answer came in the form of the Kentucky Department of Homeland Security. Their initial response was a tentative commitment to fund one electronics course, which was no small gesture. The next response was a request for an estimate to provide each of the courses to all certified technicians in Kentucky. The result was a grant to cover the costs of these courses with additional funding to provide equipment for each squad to use to continue training after the courses. (It is important to note that the 2008 State Homeland Security Grant included a 25 percent mandate for explosive response. I encourage decision makers to implement similar mandates in the future.)

A-T Solutions was awarded the competitive bid and conducted two Advanced Electronics courses, two Advanced Threat Assessment courses, and three

Bomb Squad/SWAT Interoperability courses throughout Kentucky. Extensive cooperation and coordination between all of the Kentucky squads was necessary to manage the logistics on such a scale.

The coordination and flexibility resulted in 87 percent of all Kentucky bomb technicians attending the Advances Electronics, 75 percent attending Advanced Threat Assessment, and 64 percent attending Bomb Squad/SWAT Interoperability. I firmly believe that the level of success of the initiative as well as the level of satisfaction with the training can be attributed to a few key elements that are worth mentioning specifically.

First of all, this initiative would not have been possible, without the intense commitment to cooperation among the all of the squads in Kentucky. Logistical responsibilities were shared and individual resources made available. In order to stretch allocated funds to their limit, course costs had to be managed. Food and lodging estimates were astronomical; therefore, the courses were spread out to different venues across the state. This resulted in less than two percent of the total funds being spent on travel and logistics. Tuition and course costs represented 76 percent of funds, and the remaining 22 percent was used for training supplies and equipment for the squads to take home and continue training.

Next, I highly recommend that all bomb squad commanders take the time to participate in the OBP Capabilities Analysis. It is not a critique, but rather becomes a tool to support future re-





quests for funding for both quality training and equipment. Likewise, all commanders should take the time to review the contents of the National Strategic Plan, the Target Capabilities List, and any other related documents. Being familiar with, and using the language from these documents to support grant requests is imperative. This is especially important as there are more and more agencies requesting funds. During the grant application reviews, it is clear who knows what they are talking about, and who is blowing smoke.

It is also important to think in terms of broad benefit. This project included all available squads in the state, therefore increasing response capability to the state as a whole. Grants that are multi-agency are important, but grants that benefit broad geographical areas are better. To increase the statewide benefit, vacancies that could not be filled from Kentucky squads were filled with technicians from Tennessee, Indiana, West Virginia, TSA, the FBI, and the military. Each of these agencies has responded, or has the potential to respond to explosive incidents in Kentucky.

Last but certainly not least, is the professionalism and the quality of instruction received from A-T Solutions and each of their instructors. In order to maintain consistency, our bid specs required that the same vendor deliver all three courses. This also ensured that content redundancy was kept to a minimum, making the best use of every minute. After being awarded the bid, A-T Solutions took the next logical step by supplying the same instructors for each respective course to further the consistency of instruction. This was not a simple task when the courses are spread out geographically and in time.

The instructors displayed a vast knowledge of their subjects. Although rare, students observed instances where the course content was inconsistent with standards or practices supported by HDS. While displaying the utmost confidence in their techniques, the instructors were keenly aware of the differences and encouraged students to adapt their new skills to conform to current national



standards and individual squad practices.

While each of the courses built upon one another, easy would not be an appropriate description. From the time Rick arrived with his gnomes, until Mike left

with his shipping crates full of training aides, our personnel were challenged. We quickly realized that a great deal of the funds went to logistics and quality training aids. With the exception of HDS, I cannot recall attending training where so much detail was spent in creating realistic and challenging scenarios; and where each device was functional, giving real-time feedback to the student regarding the success or failure of their mission.

On behalf of the Kentucky bomb squads, I would like to express our appreciation to Gene Kiser and Susan Wilkerson from the Kentucky Department of Homeland Security for their strong support of the project. I also wish to thank Steve Strong and the staff at AT-Solutions for their efforts in providing such quality training.

Clayton Roberts is the bomb squad commander for the Lexington, KY, Police Hazardous Devices Unit, and a NBSCAB board member.

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